

SITUATION REPORT NO. 9
FINAL REPORT
INCIDENT NO. 2003-028
DATE: October 31, 2003 TIME: 3:00 p.m.

TO: Governor John Hoeven
State Capitol
Bismarck ND 58505

1. **NATURE OF DISASTER:** **Serious Fire Danger** – Lingering drought conditions prevail in portions of western and southwestern North Dakota. The combination of hot, dry and windy weather conditions, and explosive vegetation significantly increases the risk of catastrophic wildfires.
2. **DEATHS AND INJURIES:** No change from previous reports.
3. **DAMAGES:** The Bismarck National Weather Service (NWS) issued its final Rangeland Fire Danger Index and Fire Weather Forecast for the 2003 season on Friday, October 31, 2003. Unless conditions warrant a fire danger, this product will resume in the spring of 2004. This week's weather forecast, along with long range forecasts, presented the significant weather change needed to promote prolonged index readings in the lower range. As of October 31, the entire state was categorized in the low range of the fire index.

For the week ending October 20, the North Dakota Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), indicated topsoil moisture supplies rated at 29 percent very short, 41 percent short, 30 percent adequate and 0 percent surplus compared to 16 percent very short, 27 percent short, 52 percent adequate and 5 percent surplus last year.

Livestock pasture and range conditions were rated 64 percent very poor to poor compared to 60 percent very poor to poor last year. Stockwater supplies were rated 23 percent very short, 32 percent short, 45 percent adequate, and 0 percent surplus compared to 20 percent very short, 21 percent short, 58 percent adequate and 1 percent surplus last year.

On October 7, the N.D. Forest Service report indicated strong winds that accompany seasonal weather changes have historically been associated with large fires during this time of year.

The October National Drought Summary indicated warm dry weather resulted in increased drought deterioration in the southwestern corner of North Dakota.

On October 17, a Red Flag Warning was issued by the NWS for western North Dakota due to high winds and low humidity, causing the fire danger index to rise into the extreme category.

On October 20, a Red Flag Warning was once again issued by the NWS for western and central North Dakota.

BARNES COUNTY:

On October 20, the Barnes County Emergency Manager reported a controlled burn that went out of control, one and one-half miles south of the I-94 Eckelson exit in the Mansfield Township, with the Sanborn and Valley City Fire Departments responding. All out-buildings in a farm yard were destroyed by the fire. No injuries were reported.

BILLINGS COUNTY:

On October 17, the Billings County Emergency Manager reported a 200-acre grassfire located nine miles northwest of Medora. Fire departments responding to the fire included the Sentinel Butte, Medora, Medora Rural, Fryburg, Golva, and Beach Fire Departments, as well as units from the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Park Service. No injuries were reported.

BURLEIGH COUNTY:

On October 6, Burleigh County officials reported a grass fire that burned more than 200 acres southwest of Wing. Farmers using tractors with field cultivators turned the earth around the outside edges in attempts to contain the fire in cooperation with the Wing Fire Department. A hay mower that generated sparks when it hit a rock was suspected as the cause of the fire. No injuries were reported.

McINTOSH COUNTY:

On October 6, the McIntosh County Emergency Manager reported that the Lehr Fire Department had responded to a 20-acre grassland fire, eight miles south of Lehr. The cause of the fire was unknown. On October 7, a second fire was reported at the same location, burning an additional nine acres of grassland. No injuries were reported.

On October 17, the McIntosh County Emergency Manager reported 20 to 25 acres of grassland were consumed by fire, three miles south of Lehr. The cause of the fire is unknown. No injuries were reported.

MOUNTRAIL COUNTY – FORT BERTHOLD RESERVATION:

On October 23, the Three Affiliated Tribes Emergency Manager reported a prairie fire near the Bakersfield community that burned 300 acres of grassland. Smoke damage was reported where the fire came within 10 yards of several residential homes and several cars were burned in the fire. Tribal and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) law enforcement, the Three Affiliated Tribes Grassland Fire Department, and the New Town Fire and Ambulance responded to the prairie fire near Bakersfield on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. No injuries were reported.

SARGENT COUNTY:

On October 10, the N.D. State Operations Center received a report of a grass fire four miles southwest of the Tewaukan National Wildlife Refuge, with responses from the Cayuga, Lidgerwood, Verblan (S.D.), Claire City (S.D.), and the Tewaukan rural

fire departments. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service brought in two units from neighboring districts. Three local farmers assisted with plowing fire breaks in attempts to control the fire's spread. The fire consumed 90 acres of a corn field. The source of ignition was believed to have been a hay baler. No injuries were reported.

SIOUX COUNTY:

On September 30, the Selfridge Rural Fire District reported a grass and hay fire that burned one acre, seven and one-half miles west of Selfridge. Cause of the fire was farm equipment. No injuries were reported.

On October 5, the Selfridge Rural Fire District reported a grass fire, named the Hepper fire, southeast of Selfridge near the junction of N.D. Highways 6 and 24. The fire consumed one and one-half acres of grassland. No injuries were reported.

On October 20 and 22, the Selfridge Rural Fire District responded to two fires in South Dakota. The first grass fire burned one acre, and the second burned 20 acres of grassland. No injuries were reported.

On October 21, the Selfridge Rural Fire District responded to a grass fire along State Highway 24 near mile marker four. An estimated 1,500 acres of wooded and grass land was consumed in the fire. The source of ignition was determined to have been smoldering embers from a controlled burn conducted the previous day. No injuries were reported.

WELLS COUNTY:

On October 10, the Wells County Emergency Manager reported that the Fessenden Fire Department had responded to a grass fire 21 miles south of Fessenden along U.S. Highway 52. A farmer was attempting to burn ditches along the roadway and the fire was contained to the ditch and under control in a short time. Another grass fire was reported three miles northwest of Fessenden. The fires were reported as spot fires that had been started by a combine. The fires were extinguished immediately upon arrival of fire units. On October 12, a house on an abandoned farmstead two and one-half miles southwest of Fessenden was totally destroyed by fire. The cause of the fire is unknown. No injuries were reported.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: No change from previous reports.

STATE: No change from previous reports.

FEDERAL: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided resources during the Tewaukan National Wildlife Refuge fire.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: The Three Affiliated Tribes Fort Berthold Rural Water heavy equipment operators bladed a fire barrier to protect homes in the Bakersfield Community. The Four Bears Casino and Lodge housed evacuated residents and provided a room for the New Town Ambulance to set up a triage treatment area.

6. MAJOR ACTIONS: On October 23, responders temporarily evacuated residents living in the path of the fire near the Bakersfield community of the Three Affiliated Tribes Fort Berthold Indian Reservation.
7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: No additional assistance has been requested
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: No additional outside help has been reported.
9. OTHER INFORMATION: The N.D. Forest Service advises that although fire conditions are not expected to become severe until warmer weather returns next spring, an unexpected period of unseasonably warm weather, coupled with wind conditions and dry prairie fuels, could elevate the fire danger into the very high or extreme categories in areas with little snow cover. Thirty percent of all prairie fires and 20 percent of acreage burned in North Dakota in a given year occurs in April prior to the spring green-up.

The N.D. Division of Emergency Management's Situation Reports are posted on the Division's Internet home page. The address is <http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Douglas C. Friez, State Director